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IN FIFTY YEARS

IN FIFTY YEARS

BY

MADAME BELLOC

AUTHOR OF

"IN A WALLED GARDEN," "THE FLOWING TIDE,"
ETC., ETC.

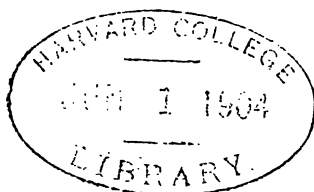
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Ms. A. 102.

A slight record
of religious thoughts,
some of which are dated.

Collected by
the wish of a dear American Friend.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
DEATH THE ENCIRCLED	9
MYSTERIES	12
WARNING	15
VOLUNTARIES	16
"	17
"	19
THE EVIDENCE OF THINGS UNSEEN	21
THE WATCH IN HEAVEN	24
THE TEACHING OF CORNELIUS	26
CARISBROOKE CHURCH	28
THE CATHEDRAL	30
THE DOME	33
ST JOHN LATERAN	37
THE LATERAN CLOISTERS	39
THE OCELIAN HILL	41
THE MONK OF MARMOUTIER	43

	PAGE
THE CURÉ OF PLOËRMEL	49
THE MASSACRE OF AVIGNON	53
ON THE BRIDGE AT POISSY	56
IN MEMORIAM.—S. G. A.	58
AN ARGYLLSHIRE MISSION	59
IN THE TABERNACLE	60

IN FIFTY YEARS

Death the Encircler

TIME rolls, and month by month
The upwelling blood of Nature fills her veins,
 And the bright wooing sun
 From the dear earth hath won
A tender blush of flowers that gladden all her plains.
 The waves come leaping in,
 And I lie clasp'd within
The kind warm arms of Nature. I could die
In such a mood as this; my limbs, dissolved,
Should be to some new herb of loveliest shape resolved,
 And I would pour my soul,
A cup of spirit-wine, from out its breathing bowl,
 To help the vital force
Which wings the stars on their unchanging course,
Or sprouts among the leaves, and I could be
So lost in Nature as to compensate for me.

Thus dreams the poet, thinking,
Thus dreams the artist, drinking
Fresh draughts of beauty every fresh created day,
Till o'er his half-escapèd spirit sweep
Those human memories ever folded deep
Within his heart: then rather would he say,
O friends! dear friends and true!
Had I, forgetting you,
Surrender'd up my spirit before the throne
Of great Queen Nature, did you but require
My love, my service, from the quivering fire,
From rock, and wave, and flower, I know would start
The outward forms and strengths of my unwavering
heart,
And my life spring obedient when you claim'd your own.
I fear not life, mine eyes are bold for seeing;
I fear nor death nor any change of being;
Meek for the present, strong for the coming day,
I tell my soul to be, as be it may;
Only I fear that I, who walk along
In your dear love so happy and so strong,
Be cut from such communion, and the roll
Of death's impenetrable waters surge above my soul.
Oh Grave! hast thou the victory over Love?
Love with the fearless eyes? I do not think
That our frail brotherhood, if on that brink

Beneath whose depths lies black oblivion,
Could wear the high aspect it girdeth on
When it goes forth to conquer ill, and give
Each loving heart the assurance—"Thou shalt live."

Oh Grave! hast thou the victory over Love?
Black shadow, creep not over sunny life,
Which, striving to put forth
Some flowers of heavenly worth,
Shrinks from thine image in unequal strife.
Oh thou, who gatherest youth,
Genius, and beauty to thy dark embrace,
Let one dear smile of pity gleam upon thy face!—
Seeds which we sow in God expand to flowers above,—
Leave us, who lose so much, eternity and love!

1849.

Mysteries

WHAT art thou, and what hidest thou,
Thou veil of fair material sense,
So thin, of baffling permanence ?
What art thou, and what hidest thou,
Thick curtain, viewless to my sight,
But shutting me from power and light ?
Grey clouds of morning barring rosy skies,
Barring the Hand which made me from mine eyes !
Sometimes from that most glorious shore
Where Christ the Lord sits evermore
Comes a faint wind ; aside one moment rolls
The awful curtain ; on our trembling souls
A vision of the Eternity which is,
Hath been, and ever shall be, very nigh
To the dear dreaming earth sweeps gloriously.
A moment hear we symphonies of Heaven,
A moment see blue depths thro' vapours riven,—
Then darkness steals upon us, and we seem
As though our hearts had fired at some unstable
dream.
Again the stern and soulless laws of nature drag
Us unrelenting, crushing those who lag ;
We hear no spherul hymns ; the subtle soul

Which works or sobs around us flies our coarse
control ;

The oratorio of the waves is dumb,
Nor from the sighing groves do any voices come.
The household angels who walk'd with us melt
Into thin air, their present love unfelt ;
And while their white wings glimmer far and faint,
Lo ! where the prophet preach'd, men seek the sculptured saint.

Ah ! we have glorious days when we seem knit
To some great Heart, whose loving beat is round,
Above, below us, and the waves reply,
And the winds whisper when they catch the sound.
We walk as gods ; a power is in our eyes,
Constraining others ; and a finer flow,
A deeper meaning in our utterance lies,
A grander breadth of purpose on our brow.
Is this the Possible held up before us,
In the warm summer of our fitful spring,
When Christ's full bounteous presence shall be o'er us,
And like a sun shall perfect everything ?

And thou, and thou, great Nature ! soul'd with beauty,
Which is unto thee as my mind to me,—
No dead conglomerate of dust and forces,
But instinct with a vital energy.

Science, in uttering thy relations, knows not,
And cannot utter of the soul within;
But the dear love we bear thee is a witness
Thou and humanity are near of kin.
Oh! church or chapel preacheth not the fulness
Wrapt in the life of Nature: she can teach
To watchful shepherds how great mysteries circle
Our little life; and ever as we reach
The heart of some great truth, retreating flieth
Her all-surrounding essence, and we find,
Tho' we perchance half fancy that we seize it,
Impenetrable mystery lie behind.

Warning

TIME, rushing past me with the noise of wings,
Woke up my sleeping spirit, and I wept
At his receding pinions moving on
Into eternity whilst I had slept.
Vainly across the gulf would I have leapt,
Crying, Oh, bear me on thy wings to heaven,
And place me on my God's right hand forgiven;
Or bear at least some Christian deed to lay
Before the throne—a faint and feeble sign
Of that which fills my heart. Came answer none
Across the abysmal darkness. Time was gone.
'Gainst he returning come, Soul, work and pray,
That he may take thee unto the Divina.

1849.

Voluntaries

BEHOLD, O Lord! these unhewn stones
Piled rudely for Thy mighty towers,
And I, condemn'd to work alone,
Possessor of few fleeting hours;
Not on the carven cornices
Shall ever mark of mine belong,
But I might place the lowest range,—
Then for my labour make me strong!

I shall not live when this dear race
Shall widen to its nobler scope,
Nor dare I say I know my soul
Will see fulfilment of its hope;
But if I fail this faith to win,
Nor think the crown reserved for me,
If these few days be all Thou giv'st,
Help them to pass in serving Thee!

I know not of myself, my soul
Is stranger to me than the smile
On some beloved face; no lights
In future days these days beguile;

I only know I live to learn,
To love, to struggle, to endure,—
When all my sight is swathed in mist
Thou and my work alone are sure!

But art not Thou enough! unseen,
Unproved, unknown, but ever near,
The days are interfused with Thee,
And every day in Thee is dear!
Lord of my life! I dare to live
Where thousands of Thy children be,
Living to live by Thy dear power,
And if I sleep to sleep in Thee!

1851.

Like berries on some inner bough,
Which swell, grow red, and straight decay,
Finding for beauty no employ,
Till all their fitness fades away;
Yet join some elemental force
And fatten soil for other trees,—
How often seem our human lives
Useless, or useful but as these!

Whether, of earthly children, sires,
Men toil and store,—or whether, cross'd
In that most ardent of desires,
The current of their lives seem lost,

Whether the task be duly done,
Or the strong word unnoticed fall,
God counts His workmen one by one,
And surely too He uses all.

No life is lost, no hope is vain,
No prayer without a sequent deed,
He turns all seeming loss to gain,
And finds a soil for every seed.
Some fleeting glance He doth endow,
He sanctifies some casual word,
Unconscious gifts His children show,
For all is potent with the Lord.

We only see the outer thing,
The secret heart of force ignore,
Lo! from some harsh ungenial spring
Full summer blossoms forth the more!
Deep lie the channels of God's grace,
Deep lies the mystery of use,
He setteth in the chiefest place
That stone the builders all refuse.

The links of time are counted up,
And all were nought if one were broken,
He knows the drops in every cup,
No word remains as if unspoken ;

We do not guess what we achieve,
Dim is the ending of our course,
Our faintest impulse may receive
The aid of supernatural force.

Half blind amidst the stir of things,
But safe in following out the law,
We know not what a moment brings,
Nor which way blows the burning straw.
When earth's great heart hath ceased to beat,
And all is finish'd as foreshown,
Marshall'd before the Judgment Seat,
Then shall we know as we are known.

1853.

Lord! if on earth Thou hast a Church,
And dost with fulness dwell therein,
Let me not wander past the porch,
And dwell forlorn in outer sin.
But whether it be straitly built,
Or, wide as all the world, embrace
Each soul that hates Thy hated guilt,
And watches for Thy quickening grace;—

Wherever Thine appointed fold
Doth like the gates of Morning stand,
And, flinging back its bars of gold,
Shows glimpses of the heavenly land,—

Oh! thither guide my wandering feet,
And grant me sight and keep me strong,
That, wrapt in Thy communion sweet,
I fail not from Thy saints among.

So, stable in my inner mind,
With peace at heart whate'er befall,
May I abide amidst my kind,
Accepting, trusting, using all
Which Thou dost in Thy love decree,
And by Thy will before me cast,
Till the true life bestow'd by Thee
Shall be by Thee resumed at last.

1855.

The Evidence of Things Unseen.

WE walk in mysteries howsoever we tread,
And none less awful that we see them not,
Or that our solemn musings o'er our dead
In life's tumultuous whirl are soon forgot.
All common things we take as if our due,
We see no riddle in the earth or sky,
We watch all beauty year by year renew,
And then with casual speech walk coldly by.
The miracle of never-dying force,
That revelation of a present God,
The torrent rushing down its Alpine course,
The tiny grass-blade piercing thro' the sod,
We talk about, but do not feel; the sun
Rains gold on all the hills, and starry flowers
Look up in gladness; the young birds are flown,
And soft sweet evenings mark the length'ning hours.
And then, perhaps, a child is born, weak thing
Created for eternity, a soul
At whose advent the heavenly angels sing,
Whom Faith and Hope and Love would fain control;
But we,—upon its face we do not see
The spirit-traces, nor within its cry

Hear marvellous whispers of much misery,
 Or peace, as may be, it shall labour by.
 Men die, we bury them; 'tis so much dust,
 Muscular, nervous tissue, Heavens! what not?
 "He was a moral man, and God is just."
 And so we leave the corpse alone—to rot.
 Moral? Perhaps; yet he in former years,
 While yet a man, did sin, or leave undone
 That which he should have done, and then the
 tears

Down his pale cheeks repentantly would run.
 And he had inward struggles, and he still,
 Tho' rising bravely after every fall,
 Fought hardest battles with an evil will;
 And by the midnight stars for help would call,
 Importuning his God. The poor soul loved,
 And left what he did love, and question'd sore
 The mysteries of the world, and ever proved
 The truth in those wise words of one of yore
 Who knew that he did nothing know. This man
 In truth was something more than flesh and blood;
 Not to be lightly spoken of; a plan
 Among the many of eternal good
 Cunningly wrought, and in him was the breath
 Of life; but what is that? It came at birth:
 From whence? and how? Was exorcis'd by Death;
 Departing where? We know not. Pray, thou earth,

And think on all these things, and dwell in awe
Of holiness upon thee; neither walk
Regardless of divinity and law
Writ in thy conscience. In thy daily talk
Mingle sometimes these themes—all is not plain,
And amidst holy oracles we live;
Shall their dim messages be all in vain,
Or wrought in those which we ourselves would give?

The Watch in Heaven

WHEN trembling angels stand aloof,
Watching the fight with folded wings,
Forbid or succour or reproof,
And every hasting second brings
News of the battle fought below,
Where Satan dares his human foe,
God! leave us not alone!

When morning dawns, and daylight breaks
Mournfully into golden flakes;
When aching hearts and heavy eyes
To meet the coming day arise,
And wondering grope, as in a dream,
Midst things that are and things that seem;
Finding that in our bitterest needs
Our usual Faiths were broken reeds,
God! hear us from Thy throne!

That grief there is when every light
Seems deep engulf'd in blackest night;
No hope, no peace, no comfort left,
And Faith of its own cross bereft,

Some know, all may; what rescue then?
How shall the weary rise again?
*A power descends on striving men,
Helping us that we live!*

More strong belief, a deeper hope,
More noble aims, a wider scope
Of love and thoughtfulness, to heal
All nearer hurts our spirits feel,
We, Father, ask, who grieve and sigh,
As if no Christ were ever nigh,
Who compass'd every grief that we
Have known, though sharp our agony.
And so, by wrestling, may at length
Our very weakness teach us strength.
All-Mighty! hear and give!

The Teaching of Cornelius

GREAT Spirit of an ancient faith,
Hear my vow,
Which I Thy solemn shrines beneath
Offer now!
With time and toil and heart and hand
To live as they
Who glorified around me stand
At peace always.
Uneasy fear and restless hope,
Longing for love,
Ambition eager for more scope,—
Behold above
The meek Christ nail'd to cruel Cross,
The heart-struck John,—
What is my petty gain or loss?
Vain dreams,—begone!
Oh God! pour strength on my weak soul,
Who fret and faint,
Such as in that most awful moment stole
On friend and saint.
Who holds us heart to heart it mattereth not,
If Thou, who holdest all within Thy hand,
Wilt say, "Well done!" upon our outward lot
Thy blessing oft is burnt with fiery brand.

If we, thus humbly reading, clasp it close,
 Accepting every law which lies therein,
 Thou (who hast covenanted) wilt unloose
 Our hearts from longing and our souls from sin.
 The love abash'd, the shuddering dread, the fail
 Of hopeful courage, unheroic fear,
 All that we cannot conquer, being frail,
 God of the Faithful! help thou us to bear!
 Alone, O tender Christ! we cannot be,
 When every street we pass is mark'd by Thee,
 And glances born of Thy great Spirit shine
 From fellow-faces with a light divine.
 Oh, look'd we clearly on the sharp ascent
 So many elder pilgrim-feet have trod,
 Seeing the End, we should not dare to faint,
 Nor speak of loneliness—alone with God!
 Help of the Faithful! my full heart to-day
 Was sad and weak.
 I said, "Before some altar I will pray,
 And He will speak."
 And Thou hast spoken! All Thy words are sure
 And surety give,
 I will more bravely all henceforth endure,
 More humbly live.

Ludwig's Kirche, Munich,
 1850.

Carisbrooke Church

CARISBROOKE CHURCH on the Fifth of November
Flung out the silver hid deep in her chimes;
This was her burden, " Be pleased to remember
The ill which they did in papistical times."

Over the Downs and the fields rich with tillage,
That fairest of Islands embellishing still,
People who walked in the street of the village
Could hear the sweet echoes flung back from the hill.

I think, my Old Church, you are somewhat ungracious,
And do not remember from whence you descended.
Who planned your strong fabric both lofty and spacious,
And laid your stone walls with zeal pious and
splendid?

What was the fount of that bountiful spirit
Which poured forth its stores to be laid at your feet?
Who wrote the great prayers which your pastors inherit,
And counted no cost as they made you complete?

Have you forgotten (or where are your manners?)
When first you stood finished, the pride of the Vale,
How red were the roses, how bright were the banners,
How keen were the neighbours to echo your tale?

The Belfries of Godshill, of Wooton, St Laurence,—
Wherever the people assembled to pray,—
Rang joyfully out (with no hint of abhorrence)
“Carisbrooke Church hears her first Mass to-day.”

Pacing the churchyard by moonlight in summer,
Watching the rainbow when green leaves turn sere,
I think, to the heart of a thoughtful newcomer,
Each trace of the old Faith should surely be dear.

And I cannot endure now to hear you declaring
At the top of your voice (though a sweet one, 'tis true),
To the mother who reared you with love so unsparing,
That She and her children are nothing to you.

5th November 1855.

The Cathedral

FINE and strong
'T has stood for long,
Jetting up its slender lances
Far athwart the archèd sky,
On whose tops the sunshine glances,
While the birds wing brightly by.
Fine and strong,
A sculptured song
Of forest hours,
Boughs, fruit, and flowers.
The oak, the vine, the summer rose,
With buds and bells no herbist knows,
Twisting round each great stone column,
With its aspect high and solemn.
Fine and strong,
Thick trees among.
Statue fretted, each stern King
Girt about with royal ring
On his brow, and sceptre laden
With his royal arms engraven ;
For all time,
A form sublime ;

Never moving,
Grieving, loving,
Ever looking calmly down
From his post as from a throne,
But one calmer than his own.
Carven niche,
Wrought in rich
Knotted angles interlacing,
Holds each fast in its enchasing,
Divided by a slender shaft.
Many a face grotesque has laugh'd
Ages from the pipes. A Virgin
Stands upon the porch's margin,
And the Child
Thus long has smiled,
Praying the weary and the poor
To come unto His Father's door.
Many warriors hereabout
Lie, some with crossèd hands devout,
Under the blue sky, but others
The great inner aisle-roof covers.
Ah! within 'tis all divine,
With soften'd shine
From every pane
Whose gorgeous stain
Lies upon
The pavement stone,

Telling many an awful story
Of the martyr days divine;
While a dim torch-lighted glory
Streams from every pictured shrine;
And the anthem slowly rolls
Over the assembled souls,
With a free
Full melody.

God Almighty framed this church
In the artist's mind, I think;
Beauty's fountains none may search,
Save who religiously will drink.

This for the Spirit
To inherit
Built he humbly,
Ay, and *dumbly*.

We can but say some man once thought
In this wise, nought else is known,
And with long endeavour wrought
His thoughts divinely into stone.

The Dome

WHO calls the broad Campagna drear,
His eyes are dull! his heart is cold!
In every season of the year
Her beauty is unthought, untold;
But chiefest when the April showers
Come brightly down and wake the flowers!

Athwart the classic Sabine hills
The high white clouds come sailing on;
With sudden gloom each valley fills;
A moment—and 'tis gone!
And o'er the vast enamell'd plain
The shadow sweeps and fades again.

Flung like a chain from mile to mile
Erect the Appian arches stand,
Like Roman knights in stately file
Drawn out to guard the land.
The long-horn'd cattle stand and gaze
Beneath them; dumb with mild amaze.

Beside an ancient Norman Tower
Built in the yesterday of Rome,
A maid from yonder mountain bower
To meet her love has come ;
And listens to the tender words
Of him who keeps the flocks and herds.

On every side the asphodel
Grows thick as on the plains of Troy ;
How bright is every bud and bell
About the girl and boy !
How sweet the voice of Nature sings
To ears that count but twenty springs !

Yet these, the children of the soil,
Who never knew a paler sky,
Whose hands are scarcely touch'd by toil,
Whose sunlit hours unheeded fly ;
Whose worst of hardship leaves them fair,
With those bright eyes, that shining hair ;

Whose griefs allow them voice to sing,
And feet to dance and lips to pray ;
Can they be thankful for the Spring
As we, who, on the Aurelian Way,
First see that far grey curve—the Dome—
Which rises o'er imperial Rome !

This is the Land by all beloved,—
Which all in several ways desire.
For me, my inmost heart is moved,
And lit as by interior fire
Of tenderness, when I but dream
Of Her who sits by Tiber's stream.

And of the plain where Tiber sweeps
And broadens to the sea-girt west,
And fragrant woods where Silence sleeps
Beside her bright unfurrowed breast,
Pine shaded, while each grassy glen
Brims o'er with purple cyclamen.

No more the nymphs and naiads play
Together on the haunted shore;
In yonder wave the god of day
With Dian's Bow contends no more;
Nor shadowy Trojan vessels glide
White-sail'd against the golden tide.

But Ostia's empty tombs that lie
In flowery fields beside the stream,
And temples roofless to the sky,
And ancient fortress towers that seem
Forgotten by all human things,
And changeless through a thousand Springs,—

These are the themes that meet the sight
And thrill the spiritual ear—
To painter's memory always bright,
To poet's muse for ever dear—
And make this land a place apart,
The Threshold of the World of Art!

Last! here abides that living Flame
Which Paul the Prisoner left for aye,
Remember how the brethren came
To meet him on the Appian Way;
And Paul "took courage." This is writ
Where every soul can ponder it.

No Church there was, no Cross to raise,
Flat lay the streets by Tiber's side,
And deep amidst the paven ways
That Colonnade where Cæsar died.
When Fifteen Centuries passed o'er Rome
The Brethren's children built the Dome!

St John Lateran

OF Temples built by mortal hands,
Give honour to the Lateran first;
'Twas here the hope of many lands—
The infant Church was nursed:

And grew unto a great estate,
And waxed strong in grace and power,
With Christ for Head and faithful Mate,
And Learning for her dower.

Since first this House to Him was raised,
Three times five hundred years have run;
For this let Constantine be praised,
An English mother's son!

He with his own imperial sword
Did dig foundations broad and deep,
That henceforth in His hand the Lord
Rome and her hills should keep.

In after ages one by one,
Arose the altars vowed to Heaven;
Each crest is sacred now, but none
Like this of all the Seven!

(38)

Behold she stands! the Mother Church!
A queen among her countless peers!
Ah! open be that sacred porch
For thrice five hundred years!

The Lateran Cloisters

THE very roses, thick with bloom,
Are golden in the golden light;
What sanctifies that belt of gloom?
What makes this court so bright?

Are other pillars half so rich,
So dainty delicate as these,
Which curl and twist like woodland niche
Set in a frame of trees!

Two legendary stones are here,
And cast a mystery round the spot;
Let none to whom his Lord is dear
Say, he believes them not!

Behold the well where Jesus stayed,
(The heart which questioned also nigh!)
And "wearied with His journey" bade
To fountains never dry.

Until for her who stood beside,
His words alone sufficed,
And as she went her way, she cried,
"But is not this the Christ?"

See measured on that pillar's round
The stature of His sacred Head;
Let that be counted holy ground
Of which such things are said.

And do not weigh what men believe,
When thus from age to age is told
A tale which eager hearts receive
With love that grows not cold.

A garden blessed by many prayers,
And centuries of sacred fame,
A pilgrim's tender footstep spares,
If only for the claim!

So pluck the golden Lateran rose
Which blooms about each ancient stone;—
And Faith which towards a Legend flows
Shall not [^]left alone!

The Cœlian Hill

Of all the seven which Rome doth boast,
(Fair hills and nobly crowned!)
I love the Cœlian Hill the most,
And think it holy ground.

'Twas here the deacon Laurence died,
And here was Gregory's cell;
The heart by honours sorely tried
Remembered it right well;

And as his pious envoys bore
The British cross on high,
He, like a sailor, turned from shore,
Looked backwards with a sigh,

And though he held within his hand
The Church from east to west,
He thought of all the Christian land
This Cœlian Hill the best.

I cannot tell, I know not why,
But Rome from hence doth wear
Peculiar brightness in the sky
And beauty in the air.

A dreamy light is in the trees,
The winding walks are still,
And quietly the perfumed breeze
Creeps o'er the Coelian Hill.

As tranquil convents faintly chime
The passing hours of prayer,
They give the only hints that time
Has marked its progress there.

The martyr's home, the saint's retreat
Have filled the place with rest;
The centuries with silent feet
Have touched its leafy crest;

And Gregory rising from his sleep
Himself would scarcely know
That past of his was buried deep
A thousand years ago!

The Monk of Marmoutier ;

Or, The Legend of Limerick Bells

THERE is a convent on the Alban hill,
Round whose stone roots the gnarlèd olives grow ;
Above are murmurs of the mountain rill,
And all the broad Campagna lies below ;
Where faint grey buildings and a shadowy dome
Suggest the splendour of eternal Rome.

Hundreds of years ago these convent-walls
Were reared by masons of the Gothic age :
The date is carved upon the lofty hills,
The story written on the illumined page.
What pains they took to make it strong and fair,
The tall bell-tower and sculptured porch declare.

When all the stones were placed, the windows stained,
And the tall bell-tower finished to the crown,
One only want in this fair pile remained,
Whereat a cunning workman of the town
(The little town upon the Alban hill)
Toiled day and night his purpose to fulfil.

Seven bells he made, of very rare devise,
 With graven lilies twisted up and down ;
Seven bells proportionate in differing size,
 And full of melody from rim to crown ;
So that when shaken by the wind alone,
They murmured with a soft Æolian tone.

These being placed within the great bell-tower,
 And duly rung by pious skilful hand,
Marked the due prayers of each recurring hour,
 And sweetly mixed persuasion with command.
Through the gnarled olive-trees the music wound,
And miles of broad Campagna heard the sound.

And then the cunning workman put aside
 His forge, his hammer, and the tools he used
To chase those lilies ; his keen furnace died ;
 And all who asked for bells were hence refused.
With these his best, his last were also wrought,
And refuge in the convent-walls he sought.

There did he live, and there he hoped to die,
 Hearing the wind among the cypress-trees
Hint unimagined music, and the sky
 Throb full of chimes borne downwards by the breeze ;
Whose undulations sweeping through the air
His art might claim as an embodied prayer.

But those were stormy days in Italy :

Down came the spoiler from the uneasy North,
Swept the Campagna to the bounding sea,
Sacked pious homes and drove the inmates forth ;
Whether a Norman or a German foe,
History is silent, and we do not know.

Brothers in faith were they ; yet did not deem

The sacred precincts barred destroying hand.
Through those rich windows poured the whitened beam,
Forlorn the church and ruined altar stand.
As the sad monks went forth, that self-same hour
Saw empty silence in the great bell-tower.

The outcast brethren scattered far and wide ;

Some by the Danube rested, some in Spain :
On the green Loire the aged abbot died,
By whose loved feet one brother did remain,
Faithful in all his wanderings : it was he
Who cast and chased those bells in Italy.

He, dwelling at Marmoutier, by the tomb

Of his dear father, where the shining Loire
Flows down from Tours amidst the purple bloom
Of meadow-flowers, some years of patience saw.
Those fringed isles (where poplars tremble still)
Swayed like the olives of the Alban hill.

The man was old, and reverend in his age ;
 And the "Great Monastery" held him dear.
Stalwart and stern, as some old Roman sage
 Subdued to Christ, he lived from year to year,
Till his beard silvered, and the fiery glow
Of his dark eye was overhung with snow.

And being trusted, as of prudent way,
 They chose him for a message of import,
Which the "Great Monastery" would convey
 To a good patron in an Irish court ;
Who, by the Shannon, sought the means to found
St Martin's offshoot on that distant ground.

The old Italian took his staff in hand,
 And journeyed slowly from the green Touraine,
Over the heather and salt-shining sand,
 Until he saw the leaping-crested main,
Which, dashing round the Cape of Brittany,
Sweeps to the confines of the Irish Sea.

There he took ship, and thence with labouring sail
 He crossed the waters, till a faint grey line
Rose in the Northern sky ; so faint, so pale,—
 Only the heart that loves her would divine,
In her dim welcome, all that fancy paints
Of the green glory of the Isle of Saints.

Through the low banks, where Shannon meets the sea,
Up the broad waters of the River King,
(Then populous with a nation) journeyed he,
Through that old Ireland which her poets sing ;
And the white vessel, breasting up the stream,
Moved slowly, like a ship within a dream.

When Limerick towers uprose before his gaze,
A sound of music floated in the air,—
Music which held him in a fixed amaze,
Whose silver tenderness was alien there ;
Notes full of murmurs of the Southern seas,
And dusky olives swaying in the breeze.

His chimes ! the children of the great bell-tower,
Empty and silent now for many a year !
He hears them ringing out the Vesper hour,
Owned in an instant by his loving ear.
Kind angels stayed the spoiler's hasty hand,
And watched their journeying over sea and land.

The white-sailed boat moved slowly up the stream ;
The old man lay with folded hands at rest ;
The Shannon glistened in the sunset beam ;
The bells rang gently o'er its shining breast,
Shaking out music from each lilled rim :
It was a requiem which they rang for him !

For when the boat was moored beside the quay,
He lay as children lie when lulled by song;
But never more to waken. Tenderly
They buried him wild-flowers and grass among,
Where on the Cross alights the wandering bird,
And hour by hour the bells he loved are heard.

1864.

The Curé of Ploërmel

JUST ere the stroke of midnight fell,
The ancient priest of Ploërmel
Sat by his fire one Christmas night.
Still as the grave the frosty air,—
His lips were murmuring a prayer,
The while his heart was softly moved
With thoughts of many a youth he loved
In college days, at peaceful Vannes,
Beside the Sea of Morbihan.
Now some were old and far away,
And some had spent their little day
In wondrous Paris on the Seine ;
And some amidst the stormy main
Which sweeps round Brittany were lost ;
Thinking of such, his brow he crossed,
And bowed the head whose locks were white.
Sudden, amidst the hush profound,
The far faint echo of a sound
Stole to his ear ; 'twas such as springs
From the slow beat of countless wings,
Or rustle of a multitude
That softly pace a moss-grown wood.

Noiseless he crossed his earthen floor,
And looked into the silvery light
Along the road which passed his door,
And saw,—a strange and awful sight!
Far as his aged eyes could reach,—
With sound of neither tread nor speech,—
Stretched the long files of grey and white.
All silent in the moonshine went
Each cloaked and hooded penitent,
Bearing a torch which burnt upright.
The trembling Curé made the Sign;
Each phantom bent in grave incline,
As when the wind of summer sweet
Bows all the rippling ranks of wheat!
The foremost, as he passed the door,
Motioned the Curé on before,
Who mute obeyed; some ghostly spell
Moved the good priest of Ploërmel.
And so the mighty multitude,
Across the moor and through the wood,
Followed, yet guided him, until
His feet by that same spell stood still
Before the open porch, which yet
In a long roofless wall was set.
The ruined church was one which long
Had only heard the night bird's song,
But still the altar-steps were there,

And a wild rose in festoons fair
Graced it in summer ; now the fern
And ivy draped it in their turn.
Then all that mighty multitude
Within the vast enclosure stood,
The moonlight on their garments shone,
And still their torches burned ; whilst one
Mounted the mossy steps, and took
Stained vestments and an ancient book,
And old chased chalice from the stone.
With silent awe the saintly priest
Robed for the wonted Christmas feast ;
And every shrouded penitent
On humble knees devoutly bent,
One served the Mass, and all intent
Responded with the mystic tone
Of winds and waves together blent.
But when he raised the sacred Host
The vague uncertain tone was lost
In sweetest music of the upper spheres ;
And when the Curé raised his hand and blest
The kneeling flock, with *Ita, missa est*,
The shrouded penitents were seen to softly rise
Like a white shining cloud to his astonished eyes ;
And ere the last sweet gospel words were done,
The nave was empty,—the good priest alone
Invoked the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost ;

While from the distant skies a heavenly host
Of souls set free from purgatorial pain,
Sang, as they took their flight, the sweet refrain,
"Hath been, is now, and ever more shall be,
World without end! Amen!"

1865.

The Massacre of Avignon

ROBESPIERRE reigned in the Place de Grève ;
And in distant Avignon his word was doom
When a band of Royalists, piously brave,
Were marched to the edge of their gaping tomb.
As they went on their way they sang—
Tender and full the chorus rang,—

*A l'heure suprême, Mère chérie,
Ora pro nobis, Sainte Marie !*

The maiden young, and the grandsire old,
And the child whose prayers were shortly told ;
And the Curé, walking side by side
With the Baron whose name was his only pride ;
The noble dame and the serving-maid—
Neither ashamed nor yet afraid,
A wonderful sight they were that day,
Singing still, as they went their way,—

*A l'heure suprême, Mère chérie,
Ora pro nobis, Sainte Marie !*

One of their murderers waiting nigh
Heard them singing as they went by,
And smiled, as he felt the edge of his blade,
At the fulness of music their voices made.

"We'll stop that melody soon," said he,
"In spite of their calling on *Sainte Marie*.
But one by one as those voices fell,
The others kept up the chorus well,—

*A l'heure suprême, Mère chérie,
Ora pro nobis, Sainte Marie!*

When all the victims to death had gone,
And the last sweet music was hushed and done,
When the pit was filled with no stone to mark,
And the murderers turned through the closing dark,
One of them wiped his sharp knife clean,
Strode over the soil where the grave had been,
And hummed as he went, with an absent air,
Some notes just caught by his memory there,—

*A l'heure suprême, Mère chérie,
Ora pro nobis, Sainte Marie!*

And when the thought of that day grew dim,
Those obstinate words still clung to him.
He was a man who said no prayers,
But his lips would fashion them unawares;
They mixed with his dreams, and started up
To check the curses bred in his cup;
They wove him round in a viewless net
Of thoughts he could not, though fain, forget,

As he still repeated, again and again,
The ghostly air and the ancient strain,—

*A l'heure suprême, Mère chérie,
Ora pro nobis, Sainte Marie !*

Thirty years were counted and o'er,
The lilies of France bloomed out once more;
The grapes which hung on the vines were ripe,
Like the penitent man on the threshold of life;
When the Angel of Death with healing came
To one who in Lyons had borne no name
But "Le Frère d'Avignon" for many a day;
Who living and dying would hourly say
('Twas on his lip as he passed away),—

*A l'heure suprême, Mère chérie,
Ora pro nobis, Sainte Marie !*

On the Bridge at Poissy

THE nightingales were singing
At Poissy on the Seine,
As I leant above the River,
Flooded high with summer rain.
Dear is that royal River ;
With ceaseless, noiseless flow,
Past the grey towers of Paris,
From the woods of Fontainebleau !

The nightingales were singing
In the rosy sunset air ;
The silver chimes were ringing,
" Christians, come to prayer !"
And I thought the invitation,
Utter'd ever, eve and morn,
Was the voice of good St Louis
In the town where he was born !

As I leant above the River,
Musing softly all alone,
The bells and birds together
Seemed blended into one ;

The rapturous thrill of nature,
So soulless, yet so fair,
Borne up upon the winged chimes,
"Christians, come to prayer!"

Fair is the Seine at Poissy,
With its islets crown'd by trees,
Fringed by spires of lofty poplars
Trembling in the summer breeze.
Fair is the antique City,
And its Church as white as snow;
Built and bless'd by good St Louis,
Built and bless'd so long ago!

Louis, being dead, yet liveth
By the waters of the Seine;
Where he trod, his kingdom blossom'd;
Where he built, his stones remain;
Where he knelt, his pious accents
Linger softly on the air.
Join, sweet birds, your invitation!
"Christians, come to prayer!"

In Memoriam.—S. G. A., *July 1893*

Sub Silentio

SILENCE is round us like a ring,
Unhindered by an alien sound;
I hear the constellations sing,
The grasses growing underground.

I hear the tread of angels' feet
Remounting the familiar stair;
Drawn hourly downwards by the sweet
Insistence of my guardian's prayer.

How often in the ways of men,
Amid the jarring and the noise,
My wandering thought has turned again,
My heart regained its equal poise.

Because, across the sea and land
A soft restraining touch I felt;
And held by an unfaltering hand,
I in that sacred silence dwelt.

An Argyllshire Mission

ATHWART the mountain side
Sweep Ossian's heroes, figures vast and dim,
Cries each grey phantom, on his midnight ride,
This land belongs to him !

Theirs were the cloudy steeps, the leaping springs,
Theirs were the inlets filled with rushing waves,
And moor and marsh and all their living wings,
And mounds of nameless graves.

But these no more are theirs, another sound
Vibrates across the water from Lochnell,
The phantoms legions melt into the ground ;—
It is the Angelus Bell !

1900.

In the Tabernacle

SAD voices far and wide have said
The letter of the Word is dead;
And wistful travellers thro' the gloom
Seem but to see the yawning tomb;
When dawn is chill and evening drear,
What would we give for Jesus near!

The earth is white with wintry snow,
And death hath laid our dear ones low;
Feel as we may, and yearn how much,
We miss the tender voice and touch;
Our hearts sink down with dismal fear,
What would we give for Jesus near!

'Tis then we seek with fond accord
Their presence who have *known* the Lord!
Whose eyes by faith have surely seen
Luminous tracks where He hath been,
As once, when angels brought good cheer,
Even to us is Jesus near!

His footsteps are not far to seek;
When patience turns the unsmitten cheek,
When conscience thrills beneath the rod,
Owning the judgment sent of God;
Where perfect love absolveth fear,
What can it be, but Jesus near?

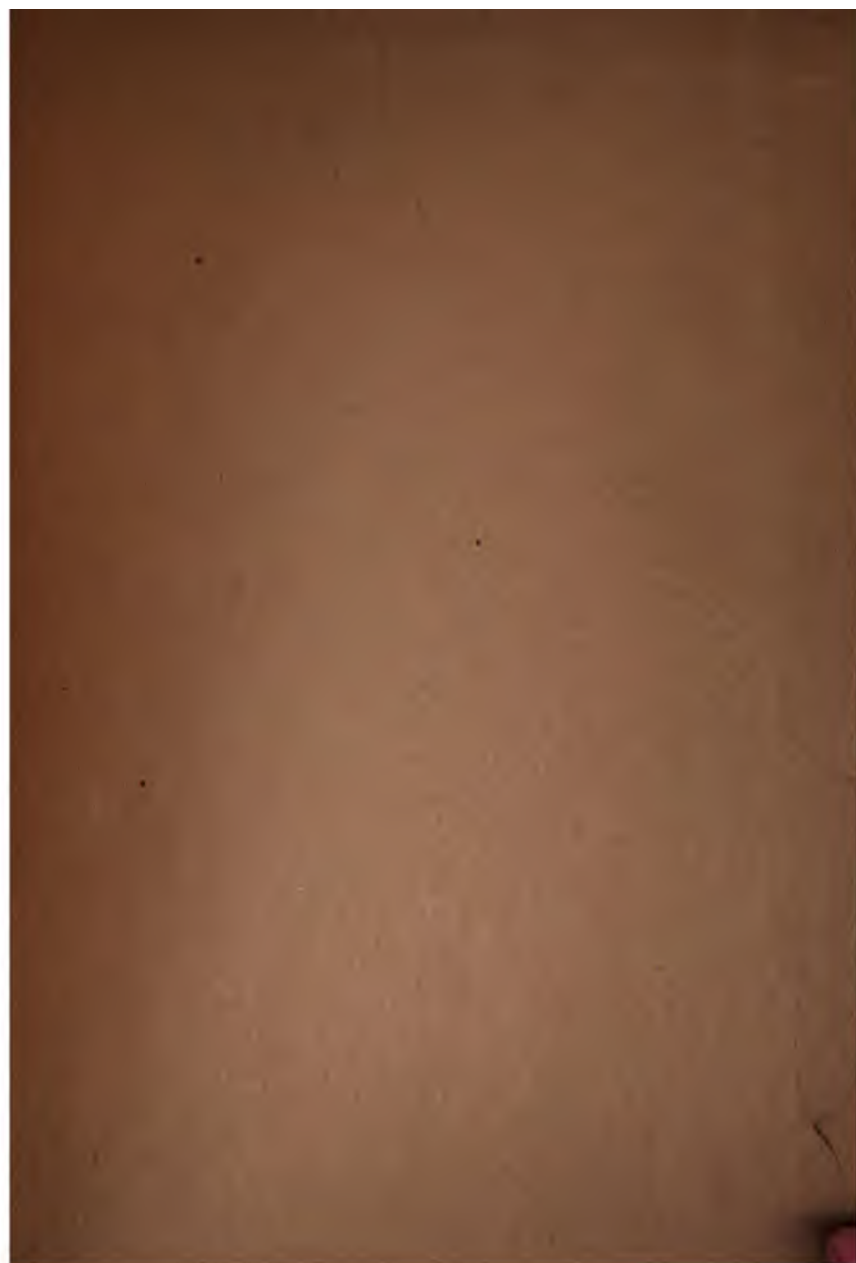
He hallows love, He softens grief,
He brings the aching thought relief,
He stills to peace the stormiest lot;
What were a world where He were not!
The waves subside, the heavens grow clear;
Could it be else with Jesus near!

What word so coins the Saviour's thought
As image He in us hath wrought!
What word can fold, or preach His Name,
Better than souls He sets aflame!
The seeking eye, the listening ear,
Know at a touch is Jesus near.

So, Lord! at last, when one by one
The minutes, hours, and days are done,
With all that we could do for Thee
(Imperfect though the offering be)
May we from that far heavenly sphere
Hear, one by one, the words "*Come Here.*"

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